

(Disclaimer: I wrote this a few months ago for friends going to Paris for the first time. It's a highly opinionated, enthusiastic view of Paris based on my 17 trips to what must surely be the most beautiful city in the world. This is obviously written from a United States viewpoint – no offense intended to anyone, just an accident of birth much like the screw up that occurred when I failed to be born to fabulously wealthy parents. Kristen Metzger)

PARIS - THINGS NOT TO MISS AND SOME BASIC GROUND RULES

Obviously the big museums – Louvre, Orsay, Pompidou Centre – lesser known but an essential stop is the Musee Marmottan, also the Rodin and Picasso Museums.

The most beautiful parks in Paris (IMHO) are the Parc Monceau and the Parc des Buttes Chaumont, both a bit off the beaten track. Both are easily accessible via subway (Le Metro).

Must sees after dark are the Place de La Concorde, the Louvre, the Champs Elysees, Arc de Triomphe and the Alexandre bridge (Pont Alexandre III). Take an evening cruise on the Bateaux Mouches. It's touristy, but a great way to see the beauty of the city at night. The price is very reasonable for the cruise, though dinner and cruise combinations are very expensive and the dinner is rumored to be not all that hot. The boats leave from the right bank of the Alma bridge (Pont d'Alma – Alma-Marceau metro stop). If the weather is good, the pedestrian bridge crossing the Seine (Pont des Arts) is a great place to be at sunset.

The best free view of Paris can be found on the top of the La Samaritaine department store (on the Seine a block east of the Louvre). The trip to the top of the Eiffel Tower generally requires a long wait in line, you have to pay and the view is really not better than the one from La Samaritaine. Until the end of this year, there is a HUGE Ferris wheel at the Place de la Concorde. It is incredible and can provide a nighttime view of Paris that is incomparable. (I went on it twice in early April and I HATE Ferris wheels – it is a huge Ferris wheel, but the cars are enclosed, so it doesn't scare you to death.) Cost was less than \$5.00.

Be sure to take the metro up to the Sacre Coeur and Place du Tertre. Definitely touristy, but required to get the flavor of Paris. Check out

the garden inside the walls of the Palais Royal. Other nice places to explore are all the little streets between the Seine and the Blvd. St. Germain, the Ile St. Louis and the area around the Place Des Vosges.

The metro is very easy to use – figure it out right away. Metro tickets are cheaper if you buy them in packs of ten. Ask for “un carnet”. Unlike the New York City subway, there’s a ticket booth in EVERY station and EVERY station entrance is open every day of the week. Metro maps are available all over town and most likely are in the lobby of your hotel. If you encounter a metro station that offers a choice of stairs or an elevator, trust me – take the elevator. They only provide elevators when the trip out of the metro is VERY long. I have mistakenly taken the stairs several times (I’m a slow learner, obviously) and by the time I’d climbed what surely must have been four or five hundred steps, I arrived back on level ground gasping for air, clutching my chest and cursing everyone. Be sure to take a ride on the line 14, the newest line, just for the experience. The ticket machine in the metro will return your ticket to you. Keep it – occasionally there are checks to see if all the riders in a car have a stamped ticket.

The bus system is a bit more complicated, but obviously you can see more of the city above ground. The buses accept the same tickets used on the Metro. Be prepared for a slower trip than on the metro.

Invest in a good detailed Michelin map (the one with the street index # 12 I think) before you leave home – the free maps you find around Paris are nearly useless except for getting to the major attractions. There are a million tiny streets that don’t show up on the free maps.

Also, check out this web site, put together by a Belgian guy. I’ve gone to some of the places he recommends and they’ve been very good – also his detailed descriptions of each arrondissement of Paris are excellent. His command of English is very good, but not great, so occasionally his selection of words is a bit odd.

<http://www.jack-travel.com/index.html>

If you monitor the newsgroup rec.travel.europe, you’ll find lots of helpful information.

Credit cards are accepted just about everywhere, though some places may only take Visa or MC and some only American Express. I would

say that Visa is the most widely accepted. There are ATM's all over town and I have used them with varying degrees of success. Some machines don't give you your money until you've taken the receipt and your card back, unlike the U.S. where the card isn't returned till you've retrieved your money. Once I took my card back assuming the machine wasn't working, got to the next corner, heard a noise, turned around and saw the machine spitting my money out onto the ground.

A small pad of paper and pencil comes in handy – like when the taxi driver doesn't understand the name & address of your hotel because your accent is atrocious. It's easier to give him a written name and address.

Embrace the idea of “When in Rome” If you're wedded to habits like a breakfast of bacon and eggs or frosted sugar bombs and watered down coffee, dinner at six o'clock sharp, then stay home. At dinner, coffee is never served with dessert, only afterward. Live with it.

Greet everyone with Bonjour, Madame or Bonjour, Monsieur, not simply Bonjour and certainly not Hi.

Don't talk to people with your hands in your pockets.

Don't eat with one hand in your lap clutching your napkin. Both hands are supposed to be above the table.

Don't eat French fries, chicken etc. with your hands. Don't pick up your lamb chop bone and start gnawing on it. The French use knives and forks for just about everything except bread.

In no way do I embrace the bottled water fad but Badoit water in France is practically addictive.

Don't get all bent out of shape if a waiter doesn't rush over to take your order the minute you sit down in a café. Just RELAX. He's not ignoring you, – they just aren't in as big a hurry as those of us from the home of fast food.

Make dinner reservations. Most restaurants are quite small, do one seating a night and if you just wander up to it, you're unlikely to get a table. Even if one is available, they are more cordial if you've made reservations. Don't patronize any restaurant where the waiters are hanging around outside encouraging reluctant diners to enter. If your

French is so lousy that you don't want to make phone calls for reservations, ask the people at the front desk of your hotel to do it for you. I've always found them to be very accommodating. In fact, if you are really set on eating in certain restaurants, fax your hotel ahead of your arrival and ask them to reserve.

I highly recommend the book *Great Eats - Paris* by Sandra Gustafson. It has places to eat from the ridiculously cheap up to dinner for 2 with wine for 80 to 120 US dollars. I've never been dissatisfied with her recommendations. Her book *Great Sleeps - Paris* is also indispensable. It covers everything from dirt cheap youth hostels to hotels between 150-200 US dollars. Both of these titles are 2001 updates to her books formerly entitled *Cheap Eats/ Sleeps in Paris*. There was an excellent article recently in *National Geographic Traveler* about rooms in Paris for less than \$100 a night. I'd be glad to mail a copy to anyone interested.

When the terrible day arrives that you have to leave Paris, make sure that you or someone at your hotel has reserved a taxi. Taxis to the airport should be reserved the day before departure. Don't neglect your luggage at the airport. If a bag appears not to belong to anyone, they blow it up. (I'm not making this up – the first time I heard an English announcement that a certain bag would be blown up if it wasn't claimed, I assumed that something had been lost in the translation. Well, it hadn't – they made everyone stand back and they blew up the bag!)

Enjoy – if it's not the most beautiful and romantic city in the world, then I need to go and find out what is.